See you.

See you.

SEE YOU TOMOR-ROW.

KISUKE-SAN.

CONGRATU-LATIONS ON YOUR NAME SUCCESSION AND YOUR ENGAGE-MENT.

I LOOK FORWARD TO YOUR ANNOUNCE-MENT AT THE KAOMISE.

THANK YOU VERY MUCH.

I'LL DO MY BEST.

SIGH

ART BY ICHIHA AKIZUKI
WRITTEN BY MAI MOCHIZUKI
CHARACTER DESIGNS BY
SHIZU YAMAUCHI

CHAPTER 21:
KABUKI-LOVE-(PART 1)

口上を断固阻止

襲名を辞退しろ

お前が市片喜助の名前を継ぐのは

Your taking of the name Ichikata Kisuke is unacceptable. Refuse the succession. Your onstage announcement will

KABUKI ACTOR ICHIKATA KISUKE-SAN ANNOUNCED HIS ENGAGEMENT LAST WEEK.

IT'S JUST MORE GOOD NEWS FOR HIM FOLLOWING THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF HIS NAME SUCCESSION IN FEBRUARY.

HIS FIANCÉE IS FORMER MODEL AND HEIRESS—

OH, AOI.

DO YOU FOLLOW ICHIKATA KISUKE?

ICHIKATA KISUKE? WASN'T EVERYONE TALKING ABOUT HIS AFFAIR WITH THAT PIN-UP IDOL NOT LONG AGO?

HMM...

I CAN'T REALLY FALL FOR A GUY WHO GETS AROUND LIKE THAT.

BUT THERE'S SO MUCH TALK ABOUT HIM WITH WOMEN...

I hate tomatoes!

WELL, HE'S BEEN IN SOME DRAMAS AND STUFF.

I GUESS I KIND OF LIKE HIM.

HE DOES HAVE THOSE TRADITIONAL GOOD LOOKS.

WHAT DO YOU MEAN?

Such bad manners.

BUT THAT'S TO BE EXPECTED, ISN'T IT? HE'S A KABUKI ACTOR.

I THINK IT'S JUST PART OF BEING AN ACTOR.

WELL...

THEY SAY SLEEPING AROUND ENRICHES THEIR CRAFT.

蔵
KURA

AT LEAST, THAT'S WHAT MY MOM SAID...

WHAT DO YOU THINK, HOLMES-SAN?

I SUPPOSE... I AGREE WITH YOUR MOTHER.

HUH?

I DON'T APPROVE OF INFIDELITY, OF COURSE.

BUT BEING AN ACTOR REQUIRES AN INSTINCT FOR SEEKING OUT THE EROTIC...

I SUPPOSE IT'S KIND OF LIKE FATE.

FATE?

IF IT DOESN'T MAKE SENSE TO YOU, AOI-SAN, YOU SHOULD WATCH A PERFORMANCE AND SEE IF YOU FEEL IT FOR YOURSELF.

DISAPPROVAL

GOING THROUGH SUCH EXPERIENCES CAN INDEED GREATLY ENRICH AN ACTOR'S CRAFT.

IT BECOMES THE LIFEBLOOD OF THEIR PERFOR-MANCE.

ROMANCE, VIOLENCE, AND THE BLOODSHED THAT COMES FROM BOTH...

YES, THAT'S TRUE.

AND HE'S A LEADING FIGURE IN THE KABUKI WORLD!

B-BUT ICHIKATA TOZABURO IS KNOWN FOR HIS DEVOTION TO HIS WIFE, RIGHT?

BUT HE TOO WAS WELL KNOWN FOR HIS PROMISCUITY BEFORE THEY MET.

SEE?!

SHE WAS AN ACTRESS, AND HE WANTED TO BE A GOOD MATCH FOR HER...

HE HONED HIS CRAFT AND MADE OVERTURE AFTER OVERTURE BEFORE FINALLY TAKING HER HAND.

THIS ISN'T ABOUT RIGHT AND WRONG.

THERE ARE ALL DIFFERENT KINDS OF LOVE.

OR, PERHAPS, DIFFERENT KINDS OF PRIORITIES.

SO KABUKI ACTORS ARE ALL...

TRY NOT TO LOOK SO DEVAS-TATED.

IF THAT'S HOW YOU FEEL, THEN WHY NOT GO SEE A PERFOR-MANCE?

HUH?

I WONDER ABOUT THAT...

KAOMISE?

I HAPPEN TO HAVE TWO TICKETS TO THE KAOMISE PRODUCTION.

I WAS THINKING OF INVITING YOU.

IT'S A SPECIAL KABUKI PERFORMANCE HELD IN DECEMBER.

IT LITERALLY MEANS "FACE-SHOWING." IT'S DESIGNED TO INTRODUCE THE ACTORS.

AND THE SHOW IN DECEMBER IS MEANT TO SHOW THE NEW ONES TO THE WORLD.

THAT'S WHY IT'S CALLED "KAOMISE."

YOU SEE, IN THE KABUKI WORLD, ACTORS ARE SWITCHED OUT ONCE A YEAR.

BUT SHOULDN'T THEY DO THAT KIND OF THING AFTER NEW YEAR'S?

GOOD QUES-TION.

I SEE! IT'S LIKE A COMING-OUT PERFORMANCE FOR THE TROUPE'S NEW MEMBERS.

THAT MEANT THE TROUPE'S LINEUP WOULD CHANGE IN NOVEMBER.

THE NEW ACTORS WOULD THEN HAVE THEIR PUBLIC DEBUT THE FOLLOWING MONTH, IN DECEMBER.

IT ALL STARTED IN THE EDO PERIOD.

THE ACTORS' CONTRACTS LASTED FROM NOVEMBER TO OCTOBER OF THE FOLLOW YEAR.

IT'S PRACTICALLY SYNONYMOUS WITH THE SEASON FOR US KYOTOITES.

AND SO THE KAOMISE BECAME A KYOTO WINTER TRADITION.

...IS NONE OTHER THAN ICHIKATA KISUKE'S ANNOUNCE-MENT.

OF COURSE, THE MAIN DRAW FOR THIS YEAR'S KAOMISE...

...

WOW...

SO, IF YOU'D LIKE, AOI-SAN...

WOULD YOU ACCOMPANY ME?

ME AND HOLMES-SAN? TOGETHER?

SPINNING

I MEAN... UM...

THOSE TICKETS MUST HAVE BEEN AWFULLY EXPEN-SIVE...

SPINNING

What?!

N-NO! IT'S NOT THAT AT ALL!

NOT FOND OF THE IDEA?

YOU THINK?

THIS COULD BE A VALUABLE LEARNING EXPERIENCE FOR YOU, AOI-SAN.

TRADITIONAL THEATER IS ANOTHER KIND OF ART.

AH!

PLEASE, DON'T LET THAT TROUBLE YOU.

I KNOW! THINK OF IT AS A BONUS FOR YOUR WORK HERE AT KURA.

GIGGLE

THAT'S SO LIKE HOLMES-SAN...

THEN I GRATE-FULLY ACCEPT!

I CAN'T WAIT TO GO!

R-RING

AKIHITO-SAN!

NOT LONG ENOUGH, I'M AFRAID.

HAVE YOU NOTHING BETTER TO DO?

'SUP, GUYS? IT'S BEEN TOO LONG!

HEY, IT LOOKS LIKE YOU GUYS ARE THE ONES WITH FREE TIME.

NO CUSTOMERS AROUND, AS USUAL.

YOUR CONCERN IS NOTED.

...

COME ON IN.

BUT THAT'S EXACTLY WHY WE'RE HERE...

ICHIKATA KISUKE?!

AND ASAMIYA REI, THE FORMER TAKARAZUKA ACTRESS!

KISUKE-SAN IS GETTING A LITTLE TOO MUCH MEDIA ATTENTION FOR US TO RELAX MOST ANYWHERE ELSE.

AKIHITO-KUN...

JUST DAZZL-ING!

WE WERE DOING A SHOOT NEARBY.

THE PRODUCTION HIT TECHNICAL DIFFICULTIES, SO WE HAD A LITTLE BREAK.

I'M SORRY FOR THE IMPOSITION.

N-NOT AT ALL...

BY ALL MEANS. YOU'RE MOST WELCOME TO REST HERE.

AOI-SAN, WOULD YOU CLOSE THE SHOP?

SURE!

IT'S LIKE AN ANTIQUES CAFE IN HERE. I LOVE IT.

...

HE'S SO CLOSE...

A real star!

...THAT YOU'RE SEIJI-SAN'S GRANDSON? WHAT A SURPRISE.

BY THE WAY, AKIHITO-KUN TOLD ME EARLIER...

I MET SEIJI-SAN ONCE AT A TV SHOOT.

MY NAME IS YAGASHIRA KIYOTAKA.

I'VE SEEN HIM IN THE GREENROOM AT MINAMI-ZA OR IN HANAMACHI.

DO YOU KNOW MY GRANDFA-THER?

I COULD PUT IN A GOOD WORD FOR YOU.

DO YOU HAVE ANY INTEREST IN SHOW BUSINESS?

BUT I HAD NO IDEA HIS GRANDSON WAS SO HANDSOME...

GRAB

THIS GUY'S A REAL WEIRDO WHO'S ONLY HAPPY WITH HIS MUSTY, OLD ANTIQUES!

HE'S TOTALLY NOT INTO THAT STUFF!

DON'T BOTHER, REI-SAN!

CREAK CREAK CREAK CREAK

YOU ARE ENTIRELY CORRECT, AKIHITO-SAN...

ON EVERY ACCOUNT EXCEPT THE "REAL WEIRDO" PART. TO THAT, I MUST OBJECT.

OW OW OW!

M-MY BAD, HOLMES!

WHOOSH

HE'S CRACKED A BUNCH OF REALLY TOUGH CASES!

HE MIGHT BE YOUNG, BUT HE'S A BRILLIANT APPRAISER AND HE'S SUPER SMART!

THAT'S WHY THEY CALL HIM THE HOLMES OF TERA-MACHI—

"HOLMES"?

IT'S JUST A NICK-NAME. FROM MY LAST NAME, YAGASHI-RA...

MMMPH!

AKIHITO-SAN.

MMMGH...

WOULD YOU KINDLY REFRAIN FROM RUNNING OFF AT THE MOUTH?

IS ALL THAT TRUE?

WOW.

NNN

NOT YOU TOO, AOI-SAN...

I DON'T KNOW ABOUT "TOUGH CASES," BUT HE'S HELPED A GREAT MANY PEOPLE WHO'VE COME IN WITH VARIOUS PROBLEMS.

I thought I was gonna die...

You too, Aoi.

ENOUGH CHITCHAT. LET ME FIX YOU BOTH SOMETHING TO DRINK.

WE HAVE COFFEE, CAFÉ AU LAIT, BLACK TEA, GREEN TEA...

A COFFEE AND A CAFÉ AU LAIT, IF YOU PLEASE.

MUCH OBLIGED.

COMING RIGHT UP.

SO, WHAT ABOUT THESE CASES?

LET ME TELL YOU ABOUT THE MYSTERY OF THE HANGING SCROLLS MY LATE FATHER LEFT BEHIND...

I CAN HEAR YOU!

IF I'M EVER IN TROUBLE, I'LL BE SURE TO COME TO YOU FOR HELP.

...AND THAT WAS THE SECRET MESSAGE BEHIND IT!

ALL THAT FROM A FEW HANGING SCROLLS? HE REALLY DOES SOUND LIKE SOME DETECTIVE...

I'LL HELP, TOO!

GIGGLE

THAT'S VERY KIND OF YOU, AKIHITO-KUN!

I COULD HARDLY REFUSE SUCH A REQUEST. IF THERE'S EVER ANYTHING I CAN DO...

OH.

THEY'RE UP AND RUNNING AGAIN. SHOULD WE HEAD BACK?

BZZZ

WHAT A SHAME. I WAS HOPING TO HEAR MORE.

THANK YOU FOR THE DRINK.

R— RING

R— RING

INDEED.

SIGH

SHOW BIZ TYPES REALLY ARE SOMETHING, HUH?

I WAS SO NERVOUS ...

HIS UNCHANGING NATURE IS ONE OF HIS BETTER QUALITIES...

YEAH, EVEN THOUGH HE'S BECOME A PRETTY POPULAR ACTOR!

BUT YOU KNOW, AKIHITO'S IN SHOW BUSI-NESS, TOO.

THAT'S TRUE.

I GUESS I JUST KNOW HIM WELL ENOUGH NOT TO GET NERVOUS AROUND HIM.

I THINK I GET WHY HE'S SO POPULAR.

BUT KISUKE-SAN IS LIKE... HE'S A REAL STAR, YOU KNOW?

BEING SO CLOSE TO HIM REALLY MADE MY HEART POUND.

IS HE YOUR TYPE, AOI-SAN?

IT'S NOT ABOUT TYPE...

I JUST THINK THAT ACTORS TEND TO HAVE A CERTAIN MAGNETISM.

IS THAT IT?

BUT NO MATTER HOW CHARMING HE MIGHT BE,

I COULD NEVER DATE A LOTHARIO!

KISUKE-SAN DOES HAVE QUITE THE REPUTATION, DOESN'T HE?

IT SEEMED EVEN HE AND ASAMIYA REI-SAN HAVE A HISTORY TOGETHER.

WH-WHY DO YOU SAY THAT?!

WHAAAT?!

THAT SUGGESTS THEY HAVE A VERY CLOSE RELATIONSHIP.

REI-SAN DIDN'T SEEM PARTICULARLY BOTHERED BY IT, EITHER.

ORDERING FOR SOMEONE REQUIRES INTIMATE KNOWLEDGE OF THEIR TASTES.

KISUKE-SAN ORDERED FOR BOTH OF THEM.

WHEN I ASKED ABOUT DRINKS, A COFFEE AND A CAFÉ AU LAIT, IF YOU PLEASE.

EVEN THE WONDERFUL REI-SAN...

AT THE VERY LEAST, I IMAGINE THEY'VE BEEN MORE THAN COSTARS IN THE PAST...

But... THIS IS MERE CONJECTURE, MIND YOU.

I HATE PROMISCUOUS MEN!

BUT I DON'T THINK IT'S UNFAIR...

...TO TEASE HER A LITTLE BIT.

IT'S NOT THAT I KNOW FOR SURE, OF COURSE...

AOI-SAN, IT'S TIME TO CLOSE UP SHOP.

RIGHT! はい

I'LL PUT UP THE SIGN.

IT'S GETTING COLDER, HUH?

SORRY FOR COMING BACK SO SOON.

ARE YOU STILL OPEN?

Y-YES...

COME IN.

KISUKE-SAN?!

KISUKE-SAN?

DID YOU FORGET SOME-THING?

...

NO...

IT'S NOTHING LIKE THAT.

YOU HAD SOMETHING TO DISCUSS, DIDN'T YOU?

I KNOW WE'VE JUST MET, SO MAYBE IT'S UNFAIR...

...TO ASK SUCH A FAVOR OF YOU, BUT...

I JUST DON'T KNOW WHAT ELSE TO DO.

WILL YOU PLEASE HELP ME?

I RECEIVED THIS.

IT WAS SEVERAL DAYS AGO NOW...

お前が市片喜助の名を継ぐのは許しがたい。
襲名を辞退しろ。
口上を断固阻止する。

Your taking of the name Ichikata Kisuke is unacceptable. Refuse the succession. Your onstage announcement will be stopped.

A THREAT-ENING LETTER?

A GREAT MANY OF THESE WERE POSTED SOMEWHERE IMPORTANT TO YOU... SOMEWHERE THAT FRIGHTENED YOU.

AM I WRONG?

OF COURSE, IN MY LINE OF WORK,

I SEE MORE THAN MY SHARE OF JEALOUSY, BUT...

THIS IS...

IT'S QUITE SIMPLE, REALLY.

HOW DID YOU KNOW?

N-NO, YOU'RE EXACTLY RIGHT!

お前が市長名を継ぐ

遺書名を

THAT MEANS IT'S HIGHLY UNLIKELY THIS IS THE ONLY ONE.

AND FROM THE LOOK OF THE INK, THIS DIDN'T COME FROM A PRINTER... IT CAME OUT OF A COPY MACHINE.

Your [illegible] name Ichikata Kisu[illegible] is unacceptable. Refuse the succession. Your onstage announcement will be st[illegible]

I CAN SEE THE TAPE MARK HERE AT THE TOP, MEANING THIS WAS HUNG SOMEWHERE.

AT LEAST, THAT'S WHAT I WOULD DO.

AND BECAUSE OF ITS NATURE, IT WOULD BE FAR MORE INTIMIDATING TO PUT UP A MULTITUDE OF THEM.

BUT INSTEAD, YOU CAME TO ME, A COMPLETE STRANGER...

EVEN IF YOU HAPPEN TO KNOW MY GRAND-FATHER.

NOW, REGARDING WHERE YOU FOUND THESE...

IF IT WERE SOMEWHERE PUBLIC, IT SHOULD HAVE BEEN EASY ENOUGH TO WRITE IT OFF AS TYPICAL HATE MAIL OR GO TO THE POLICE.

THAT TELLS ME THIS THREATENING LETTER WAS POSTED SOMEWHERE VERY PERSONAL TO YOU...

AND YOU SUSPECT IT WAS AN INSIDE JOB OF SOME KIND, CORRECT?

EVEN AFTER WE LEFT, HE KEPT TALKING ABOUT HOW AMAZING YOU ARE.

I'LL HAVE TO HAVE A WORD WITH HIM ABOUT THAT LATER...

AKIHITO-KUN WAS RIGHT ABOUT YOU.

IT'S JUST AS YOU SAY.

WHAT?

THESE LETTERS WERE POSTED ALL OVER MY GREENROOM AT THE MINAMI-ZA THEATER.

BUT WE WERE ONLY REHEARSING THAT DAY. THE THEATER WASN'T OPEN TO THE PUBLIC.

THE ROOM WASN'T LOCKED...

IT CAME OUT OF NOWHERE. I'M AT A COMPLETE LOSS.

BUT I CAN'T AFFORD TO ESCALATE THINGS BY GOING TO THE POLICE NOW.

SO, PLEASE...

OF COURSE, NOBODY SAW ANYONE SUSPICIOUS...

AND I HAVE NO IDEA WHO COULD HAVE DONE THIS...

YOUR KAOMISE DEBUT IS COMING UP, AFTER ALL.

VERY WELL. LET ME GET RIGHT DOWN TO IT.

THAT'S RIGHT.

THIS WILL BE KISUKE-SAN'S FIRST KAOMISE SINCE HIS NAME SUCCESSION...

WELL... LOTS OF PEOPLE, I THINK.

IS THERE ANYONE UNHAPPY ABOUT YOU TAKING UP THE NAME ICHIKATA KISUKE?

WHAT?

REALLY?

THAT'S JUST HOW THEATER IS.

I'M SORRY TO SAY IT,

BUT IN TERMS OF SHEER TALENT, HE WAS A SERIOUS CONTENDER FOR THE NAME.

BUT IF I HAD NARROW IT DOWN, I'D SAY MY BIG BROTHER, MATSUNOSUKE.

I BELIEVE THE MAIN REASON IS THAT MY UNCLE, ICHIKATA TOZABURO, PUSHED FOR ME.

THEN WHY DID YOU RECEIVE IT?

I'M SURE TOZABURO-SAN JUST THOUGHT YOU WERE MORE TALENTED. THAT'S ALL.

"B-BUT ICHIKATA TOZABURO IS KNOWN FOR HIS DEVOTION TO HIS WIFE, RIGHT?"

"AND HE'S A LEADING FIGURE IN THE KABUKI WORLD!"

So that's Kisuke-san's uncle?

AND, ALL TALENT ASIDE, I WAS THE BEST CANDIDATE IN THAT REGARD.

BUT NOT EVEN KABUKI IS ABOVE ATTRACTING AUDIENCES WITH STARS.

I HOPE YOU'RE RIGHT...

...

POPULARITY IS IMPORTANT AS A PERFORMER.

YOU MUSTN'T SELL YOURSELF SHORT.

Your taking of the name Ichikata Kisuke is unacceptable. Refuse the succession. Your onstage announcement will be stopped.

口上を断固阻止

襲名を狙う玉

お前が片言喜助の名を継ぐのは

ONE MORE THING.

YOU HAD YOUR SUCCESSION CEREMONY THREE MONTHS AGO, CORRECT?

BUT YOU SAID YOU RECEIVED THIS JUST THE OTHER DAY.

WHEN, PRECISELY, WERE THE LETTERS PUT UP?

WHEN? UM, IT WAS...

AFTER YOUR ENGAGEMENT WAS ANNOUNCED LAST WEEK?

...AM I RIGHT?

HE'S PRETTY TRANSPARENT, ISN'T HE?

WHICH MEANS THAT YOUR ENGAGEMENT IS CONNECTED TO THIS THREAT SOMEHOW.

IT WAS JUST AFTER THE ENGAGEMENT WAS ANNOUNCED.

YES.

YOU'RE EXACTLY RIGHT.

W-WELL... I JUST WANTED TO LIVE WITH HER.

HER FAMILY IS VERY STRICT, SO THEY SAID THAT WAS OUT OF THE QUESTION UNLESS MARRIAGE WAS IN OUR FUTURE.

IF I MAY BE SO BOLD, YOU'RE STILL A YOUNG MAN IN YOUR PRIME.

WHAT INSPIRED YOU TO SETTLE DOWN SO EARLY?

YOU DIDN'T GET HER PREGNANT, DID YOU?

STARE

THEN YOU'RE CURRENTLY LIVING WITH YOUR FIANCÉE?

YES.

KISUKE-SAN.

THE PERSON BEHIND THESE THREATENING LETTERS...

...IS SOMEONE CLOSE TO YOU...

...WHO RESENTS BOTH YOUR NAME SUCCESSION AND YOUR ENGAGE-MENT.

THAT SAID, THE LETTER DIDN'T MENTION THE ENGAGEMENT SPECIFICALLY.

IT MAY HAVE BEEN NOTHING MORE THAN A CONVENIENT TRIGGER.

OR ELSE...

DOES THAT BRING ANYONE TO MIND?

THERE'S A REASON THEY COULDN'T CRITICIZE YOUR ENGAGEMENT.

IT... IT COULDN'T BE...

WAIT...

I'M SORRY TO BARGE IN ON YOU LIKE THIS.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR HELP.

CRUMPLE

I SHOULD PROBABLY BE GOING.

KISUKE-SAN.

YOU NEVER KNOW WHAT SOMEONE LIKE THAT MIGHT RESORT TO.

DO BE CAREFUL.

THIS HARASSMENT SUGGESTS VERY STRONG FEELINGS ON BEHALF OF THE PERPETRA-TOR.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT IS UP TO HIM.

I HOPE HE'LL BE OKAY...

BUT HUMAN PASSION CAN BE A TERRIFYING THING.

I JUST HOPE NOTHING COMES OF IT...

CHAPTER 21
END